

Sofia Confessions in Error, Americans and Britons Say

Western Officials in Bulgaria Cite Falsities in Dates and Names of Ex-Colleagues in Statements by Protestant Clerics

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SOFIA, Bulgaria, Feb. 27—United States and British officials in Sofia, who have been studying the confessions and indictment of the Protestant clergymen who have testified thus far in the trial of fifteen Bulgarian church leaders on charges of treason, espionage and black-marketing, reject the accusations implicating former officials of American and British elements of the Allied Control Commission and Legations.

They reject the charges for technical and substantive reasons. They point out that the Rev. Vasil Ziapkov alleged he had held conversations with certain Americans at times when they were either absent from Sofia or had already permanently left their posts. Mr. Ziapkov, they said, alleged a conversation with Louis Beck, one-

time Commercial Attaché at the United States Legation long before Mr. Beck ever arrived at Sofia to take over his post.

Mr. Ziapkov also sought to implicate a "Burt Andrews," a member of the British element. It was observed here that Burt-Andrews is a hyphenated name borne by two brothers. One was a diplomat and the other an Air Attaché. The two brothers were not in Sofia simultaneously, and some alleged conversations with the alleged Burt Andrews occurred at a time when there was not anybody by that name in Sofia.

Denis Greenhill, First Secretary of the British Legation, and the only British official named in the proceedings who is in Sofia, said today that Mr. Ziapkov's testimony

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implicating him was a complete distortion of the facts.

Mr. Greenhill said he had met Mr. Ziapkov at a dinner party on Nov. 2, 1948. Mr. Ziapkov was arrested two days later. Mr. Greenhill maintains that he hardly said anything to Mr. Ziapkov, whom he hardly knew, except the customary polite phrases one utters at social gatherings.

American and British officials said in defense of their one-time colleagues that, as members of the Allied Control Commission, they would have been justified in speaking to any Protestant pastors, or anyone in Bulgaria for that matter, because it was their duty as commission members. But officials energetically deny allegations contained in the defendants' confessions.

American and British officials fear that the current trial can only result in complete quarantining of the United States and British Legations and the complete isolation of both from any contact with Bulgarian citizens and the realities of present-day Bulgaria.

They also observe that the current trial, by discrediting all things Western, including Western education, marks the end of a long period of Western orientation among many segments of the Bulgarian people. They call attention to that part of Mr. Ziapkov's testimony in which he attributed his downfall to the fact that he attended college in Great Britain as a young man, where he absorbed many Western ideas, including his strong sense of "Americanism."

Pastor Georgo Nikolov Chernev, head of Pentacost churches, is scheduled to make his confession

tomorrow when the trial is resumed.

Mr. Chernev's confession covers 246 manuscript pages. He and pastors Vasil Ziapkov of the Congregationalists, Yanko Ivanov of the Methodists and Nikola Mihailov of the Baptists are the four principal defendants.

The shape of the trial has been somewhat clarified. These four ministers, as heads of their respective churches, constitute the Supreme Council of United Protestant Churches in Bulgaria and are the focal point in the indictment.

Eleven other defendants, who are members of these four denominations constituting the council, are of lesser rank and are, therefore, defendants of secondary rank.

Similar Pattern Followed

Mr. Chernev's written confession, which he will read in court, follows the same pattern as those of Messrs. Mihailov, Ivanov and Ziapkov. He alleges that he and his friends gathered military, political and economic information that he transmitted to Cyril Black, former official of the American element of the Allied Control Commission through Messrs. Ziapkov and Mihailov.

Mr. Chernev's confession will terminate the lengthy statements of the four star defendants. After that the procedure will accelerate because the secondary defendants are expected to be briefer in their confessions.

The trial, however, is expected to continue until a week from next Wednesday because following all the confessions and witnesses' testimony, counsel for each defendant and the prosecution will make final pleas.

All the defendants are charged under articles of the criminal code that make them liable to the death penalty, but the prevailing view is that they will escape with life terms or long sentences.

It is noted that, according to their own testimony, the defendants cooperated without reservation with the security police since confessing their acts and aided in

enlightening the authorities on the most minute ramifications of the alleged spy ring.

Messrs. Mihailov, Ivanov and Ziapkov obeyed the injunction of Judge Konstantin Oundjiev, president of the Court, to confess because if the Court were satisfied with their frankness and honesty it would take this into consideration in the final verdict.